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ABSTRACT

Felner's transitional events model, which views post-divorce adjustment as a function of the environmental stressors a child faces and the interpersonal and intrapersonal resources available to the child, was used as an underlying framework for the development of a parent training program for divorced families. Five modifiable factors found to be significantly associated with children's post-divorce adjustment were identified: (1) quality of the custodial parent-child relationship; (2) discipline strategies; (3) negative divorce-related events; (4) contact with the noncustodial parent; and (5) contact with and support from non-parental adults. Multiple strategies were used to change these factors in 11 group sessions and 2 individual sessions of the program. The groups consisted of five to eight custodial or primary residential mothers and were led by two of eight graduate students in clinical or community psychology. Measures of the putative mediators and of children's adjustment were obtained from both mothers and children pre- and post-intervention. A randomized experimental versus wait list control design was used to evaluate the program. At posttest, families in the intervention group reported better functioning than did families in the control group. The results suggest that the program was clearly effective in enhancing the quality of the mother-child relationship and in decreasing negative divorce related events. Positive program effects on discipline occurred for mothers' reports. Expected changes in father-child contact and support from non-parental adults did not occur. (NB)

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Evaluating an Empirically Based Parent Training Program for Divorced Families

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The theoretical model we have found most useful in understanding children's post-divorce adjustment is Felner's transitional events model. Felner views post-divorce adjustment as a function of the environmental stressors the child experiences as well as the interpersonal resources and intrapersonal resources available to the child. There are two implication of this model for prevention programs. First, not all children of divorce may need or benefit from preventive interventions. Second, to affect children's mental health outcomes, prevention programs should target both risk and protective factors.

With this model as an underlying framework, we identified five modifiable risk and protective factors which researchers have consistently found to be significantly associated with children's post-divorce adjustment. These were: quality of the custodial parent-child relationship, discipline strategies, negative divorce-related events, contact with the noncustodial parent and contact with and support from non-parental adults. We used multiple strategies to change each mediator and whenever possible, we selected strategies whose efficacy had been demonstrated empirically.

This overhead provides a sequence of the sessions and the skills covered in each session. As shown, there were 11 group sessions and two individual sessions. The last group session, the follow-up session, was held three months after the posttest. There are a couple of important things to note

about the program. First, sessions 2-5 focused on the quality of the custodial parent-child relationship and thus, this mediator was given significantly more attention than the other variables. Also, the last three sessions focus on maintenance of the program skills rather than a specific mediator.

As should be clear from the last overhead, the orientation of the program is cognitive behavioral and it has a strong emphasis on skills acquisition or enhancement. Each session included a short lecture with active group participation, skills demonstration, skill practice, homework assignments, and problem solving of difficulties mothers encountered in using the skills with their children.

The groups consisted of 5-8 custodial or primary residential mothers and each group was led by two of eight graduate students in clinical or community psychology. The curriculum was highly structured and we took several steps to ensure that the program was delivered as planned. First, the content and format of each session were detailed in lengthy session outlines which the leaders followed during the sessions. Second, extensive training and ongoing supervision were provided. Third, leaders completed lengthy process evaluation forms about the material covered after each session.

To evaluate the program, we used a randomized experimental versus wait list control design. Families were recruited

primarily through sampling of court records for dissolution. We also recruited participants through advertisements and presentations to school personnel. Families were eligible if the divorce had been granted within the last two years, the primary residential or custodial parent was female, there was a child between the ages of 8 and 15, neither the mother nor the child was in treatment for psychological problems and the mother had not remarried and did not have plans to remarry within the time period covered by the study.

From the pool of interested families, we excluded and referred for immediate treatment children who scored in the clinical range on the Children's Depression Inventory or had concrete plans for suicide. In addition, we excluded families who scored in the top 30th percentile on a composite index of a subset of the mediating variables. These families were excluded because they were functioning well on the putative mediators targeted for change. In other words, we didn't want to try to fix what wasn't broken. Seventy families completed pre and post test interviews.

Measures of the putative mediators and of children's adjustment were obtained from both mothers and children pre and post intervention. As shown on this overhead, we collected extensive process evaluation data including several measures of participants' involvement and compliance with homework assignments. We also collected data on consumer satisfaction and on the integrity of the delivery of the

program.

Although I will focus on the outcome evaluation, let me briefly note that the attrition analyses showed no evidence for differential attrition across condition and that the analyses of the process evaluation data suggest that the program was delivered as planned and was delivered consistently across groups.

To assess whether the program impacted the putative mediating variables and/or children's adjustment, we used 1 way ANCOVAs of the posttest scores, with pretest scores as the covariate. For several variables, the assumption of homogeneity of the regression slopes was violated, indicating that the intervention effect differed at various levels of the covariate. For these variables, we used the Johnson-Neyman procedure to identify the range of pretest scores for which significant posttest group differences occurred.

This overhead provides the results of the analyses. Given that time does not permit a detailed discussion of the findings, I will leave the overhead on for the remainder of the talk, to allow you to get a better picture of the findings. Let me note that with the exception of support from non-parental adults, the significant ANCOVA results were in the expected direction. At posttest, families in the intervention group reported better functioning than did families in the control group. Also, all of the Johnson Neyman analyses indicated that significant posttest

differences across groups occurred for families who were functioning poorly on these variables at the beginning of the study. In all but one case, these group differences were in the expected direction. At posttest, families in the intervention group reported better functioning than did families in the control group. The exception occurred for one of the measures of depression. For those few children whose pretest depression scores were extremely high, intervention increased depression at posttest relative to the control condition.

What can we conclude from these findings? It appears that not all the putative mediators were equally impacted. The program was clearly effective in enhancing the quality of the mother-child relationship and in decreasing negative divorce related events. Also, positive program effects on discipline occurred for mother's reports. However, expected changes in father-child contact and support from non-parental adults did not occur. In terms of children's mental health outcomes, improvement was noted from both mothers' and children's perspectives. However, a negative effect of intervention was observed for one of the measures of depression for children with extremely high initial levels. It is also important to note that for several variables, a positive intervention effect occurred only when the initial level of the variable indicated poor functioning.

There are several issues that are raised by these data.

The first involves the differences in the pattern of findings across reporter. The program effects are more positive and consistent for mothers' reports. Because mothers participated in the intervention, demand characteristics might be advanced as an explanation. However, attributing the intervention effects solely to demand characteristics does not seems to be warranted for two reasons. First, the two other published parent programs for children of divorce, which should contain similar levels of demand characteristics, have shown no effects on parental reports of children's mental health. Second, although the findings are less consistent for children reports, children did report program effects on some mediators and mental health outcomes. Nevertheless, in our future research, we will include a behavioral observation component and obtain data from teachers. Other possible explanations are that children may be less sensitive observers of their environments than are mothers and that children's perceptions of their environments may be more stable. Thus, children may need a great deal of exposure to changed conditions for their reports to reflect these changes. In our future research, we will obtain 3 and 6 month follow up data to assess this hypothesis. The second issue has to do with the unexpected effect of the intervention on support from non-parental adults. Because a major focus of the program involved increasing the quantity and quality of time the child spent with the mother, children

in the intervention may have had less time and/or need to seek support from non-parental adults. A third issue concerns whether the intervention effects on mental health outcomes are mediated by changes in the putative mediating variables. We have just begun mediational analyses and the preliminary results suggest support for a mediational model.

In conclusion, this field trial has suggested that the program is a very promising one. We are now in the process of revising the program on the basis on the outcome and process evaluation data, the results of causal modeling analyses, and mediational analyses. We are also developing a coping enhancement program for children. Over the next few years, we will compare the immediate and follow up effects of our revised parent program and a condition in which mothers participate in this program and their children participate in the coping enhancement program.

SESSION/TOPIC(S)	SKILLS
1. INTRODUCTION	INFORMATION ABOUT EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN AND ROLE OF CUSTODIAL PARENT IN FACILITATING ADJUSTMENT
2. REVERSING THE STRESS INTERACTION CYCLE	1:1 TIME
3. ENHANCING COMMUNICATION-I POSTIVE DISCIPLINE	CONTINUING RESPONSES CATCH'EM BEING GOOD
3A. (INDIVIDUAL SESSION) OBSTACLES TO PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION	PROBLEM SOLVING
4. ENHANCING COMMUNICATION-II	MIRRORING CONTENT RESPONES
5. ENHANCING COMMUNICATION-III SPECIFIC DIVORCE RELATED CONCERNS	FEELING RESPONES
6. NONCUSTODIAL PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP	IDENTIFICATION OF OBSTACLES; ASSESSMENT OF ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES OF REMOVING OBSTACLES
6A. (INDIVIDUAL SESSION) KEEPING CHILDREN OUT OF THE WAR ZONE	ANGER MANAGEMENT SKILLS
CONTACT WITH NONPARENTAL ADULTS	SOCIAL NETWORK ASSESSMENT
7. DISCIPLINE I	CLARIFICATION OF EXPECTATIONS AND RULES SELF-MONITORING PRACTICE USING CONSISTENT CONSEQUENCES-POSITIVE BEHAVIOR
8. DISCIPLINE II	CLARIFICATION OF EXPECTATIONS AND RULES SELF-MONITORING PRACTICE USING CONSISTENT CONSEQUENCES-NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR
9. KEEPING THE PROGRAM GOING	TIME MANAGMENT VALUES CLARIFICATION
10. DEALING WITH SETBACKS	RELAPSE PREVENTION STRATEGIES
11. FOLLOW UP	PROBLEM SOLVING

PROCESS EVALUATION

Participant Involvement	Timing of Administration	Rater (s)
1. Attendance	each session	2 co-leaders*
2. Involvement	each session	2 co-leaders*
3. Homework completion	each session	participants
4. Ratings of frequency of use of program skills	post-intervention followup	participants
Satisfaction with Program		
1. Helpfulness of program skills & program components	mid-intervention post-intervention	participants
2. Leaders' level of knowledge and competence	mid-intervention post-intervention	participants
3. Open-ended question re: most and least helpful aspects of group	post-intervention	participants
Integrity of Delivery of Program		
1. Coverage of each topic in session a. time given b. quality of coverage	each session	2 co-leaders*
2. Leader's knowledge and master of material	each session	2 co-leaders*
3. Leader's ability to facilitate group discussion	each session	2 co-leaders*

*Ratings were made independently

MODIFIABLE RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

MOTHER'S REPORT

Construct/Variable

Quality of custodial parent-child relationship

- Acceptance ($p<.08$)
- Communication ($p<.02$)
- Positive activities with child ($p<.001$)

Contact with noncustodial parent

- Face to face contact
- Attitudes toward noncustodial parent's parenting abilities ($p<.07$)
- Attitudes toward impact of noncustodial parent-child relationship

Discipline

- *i*Consistency
- Control ($p<.01$)

Negative divorce-related events

- Overt interparental conflict
- *i*Negative divorce events

MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

- *i*Total behavior problems

CHILDREN'S REPORT

Construct/Variable

Quality of custodial parent-child relationship

- *i*Acceptance
- Communication
- Positive activities with mother

Contact with noncustodial parent

- Number of hours spent in last two weeks

Contact with/support from nonparental adults

- Total support functions ($p<.02$)

Discipline

- Consistency

Negative divorce-related events

- *i*Overt interparental conflict
- *i*Negative divorce events

MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

Depression
- Children's Depression Inventory
- *i*Child Assessment Scale

Conduct Problems
- Youth Self-Report ($p<.02$)
- Child Assessment Scale

Anxiety
- Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale

i = effect differed by pretest level